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ABSTRACT

The constraints and contingencies posed for school district governance by the existence and activities of a teachers' association affect district policy in subtle ways, according to this study of the Tacoma, Washington, school system. This research was conducted in conjunction with the Experimental Schools Program (ESP) over a five-year (1971-1975) period. It indicates a generally stable relationship between the teachers' association and the school district. Acute polarization and hostile adversary relationships did not arise in the negotiations process or in other areas of interaction between these two parties. The agreements generated between teachers and the district most strictly defined issues of teacher welfare such as salary, working conditions, and job security. Issues of professional practice, including instructional personnel selection and program determination, were not covered in the negotiation agreements; the district administration retains control over these areas. As the negotiations process increasingly leads to contractual and legalistic definition of such matters as working conditions and professional practices, it would be expected that the school district's ability to respond to change would be curtailed. However, long-term transformations in school system characteristics may result from the power equalization between teachers and administration. (Author/DS)

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TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION IMPACTS UPON GOVERNANCE OF A SCHOOL SYSTEM

A paper presented in Division A of the
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TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION IMPACTS UPON GOVERNANCE OF A SCHOOL SYSTEM

Douglas R. Pierce

This paper illuminates impacts of a teachers' association upon the governance of a school system. It describes the kinds and the amounts of constraints and contingencies which are posed for a school system's governance by the existence and activities of a teachers' association. It also describes the school system's response and the evolving relationship.

Conceptual Underpinnings

The conceptual underpinnings of this inquiry are articulated in James D. Thompson's Organizations in Action (McGraw-Hill, 1967). This open social systems conceptualization depicts organizations engaged in exchanges with environmental elements. Uncertainty results, and flows into the organization's internal relationships. Governance involves the exercise of discretionary action by which the basic problems of uncertainty are coped with and resolved (briefly, governance is the process of co-aligning organizational capacities with the resources of the environment).

This inquiry is addressed to school system uncertainties and dependencies generated by the existence and action of a teachers' association, an environmental element which influences goal setting and goal attainment for the school system. The teachers' association poses constraints (conditions which do not vary with the action of the school system and to which the school system must adapt) and contingencies (conditions which may vary with school system action yet are not subject to arbitrary control by the school system, which the school system must anticipate and cope with to protect and promote its control of goal setting and goal attainment). This inquiry seeks to illuminate such constraints and contingencies as they impinge upon the governance process, and proceeds further to illuminate the response and the evolving relationship.

Setting and Methodology

This study was performed in a school system which is being subjected to rather extensive evaluation research. The school system, one of the original three Experimental Schools Program (ESP) sites, serves about 7,500 K-12 students in 13 schools in a suburban area of Tacoma, Washington. The National Institute of Education-funded project is providing the school district with about $5.5 million over the period of 1971-76 to effect comprehensive changes oriented toward providing an appropriate environment for optimal learning for each student. This involves comprehensively changing the ongoing school system in the areas of school-community interactions, governance and instruction. Formative

evaluation is provided through the district's evaluation component. An external, summative evaluation of the project is being conducted by a nine person on-site team from the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.

A teachers' association constitutes the employee organization legally recognized by the school board as the exclusive representative of the certificated employees and school nurses (but excluding vice principals and principals) for the purposes of collective negotiations. Its membership numbered approximately 328 in 1974-75, lacking only about 18 of the teachers employed by the district. It had come into being in 1935, with its initial function largely social. Before the initiation of the Experimental Schools Project the teachers' association had developed a differentiated organizational structure including linkages with affiliated organizations. By mid-project (1973-74) those linkages had been strengthened by the services of a professional staff member, shared with the teachers' associations of two nearby districts.

The early teachers' association-school system relationships were grounded in an era of harmony. Subsequently, those relationships were sharpened both by a set of developments beyond the control of either the association or the district (e.g., the 1965 enactment of the Washington negotiations act, various later "rights" movements, competition between NEA-AFT), and by internal differentiation within teachers' association. Those relationships remained open to further change as the school system was subjected to the ESP intervention. A developmental perspective thus was essential and was emphasized in the inquiry.

Within this setting we performed a case study to illuminate teachers' association-school system relationships as they constrained and conditioned the process of school system and particularly of ESP governance. We observed varied settings including sessions of an ESP cabinet, the superintendent's cabinet, principals' meetings, and the teachers' association executive council and representative assembly. We interviewed past and present teachers' association officials (plus officials of affiliated organizations) and the school district administrators. We collected and examined copies of pertinent agendas, minutes, constitutions and by-laws, negotiated agreements, policy and procedure statements, and memoranda. The observations, interviews and documents reviewed spanned the period of September 1971 through June 1975.

This report of the case study is limited to a summarization of the findings of main interest and to their interpretation and implications.

Findings

A hueristic distinction can be made between two kinds of issues. Process issues involve terms of the teachers' association-school system relationship, including definition of the scope and process of negotiations. Issues of substance involve terms of employee welfare, professional practice, and institutional welfare. While the basic distinction is straightforward, its application is not necessarily simple. The two sets of issues are not mutually exclusive. Rather, issues of

the second kind may well be used as vehicles for resolution of issues of the first kind. For example, an issue of substance pertinent to teacher welfare (involving reduction in force) served as a vehicle for resolving a process issue pertinent to the time at which negotiations could occur.

The distinction sensitizes us to possible indirect and unapparent functions of issues, also raising to awareness the possibility of developmental phases in which at times process issues predominate while at other times issues of substance predominate. The possibility of progressive or developmental predominance among types of issues of substance (employee welfare, professional practice, and institutional welfare) also is raised to awareness. (Determination of whether such possibilities regularly occur, however, would require a research strategy and investment beyond the scope of this present case study.)

Process Issues

Important process issues include the scope of issues subjected to negotiations, who is involved in the negotiations process, when issues are subjected to negotiations, and how the resolution of issues is communicated. Less tangible issues involve the generation of predictability and trust both by the membership in their representatives and between those representatives, and the development of capacity and inclination to take risks and exercise discretion.

The scope of issues subjected to negotiation. In terms of the scope of issues subjected to negotiated agreement, the teachers' association-school system relationship has remained generally stable through the Experimental Schools Project, and only marginally comprehensive in terms of the population of employee-employer relationships potentially subject to negotiated agreement. The rather typical 1974-75 agreement, for example, included 69 items, the bulk of which dealt with personnel (44 of the 69 items), while only one-third as many items dealt with instruction, and with the remaining few items evenly divided between administrative and business affairs. These agreements covered such matters as assignment and transfer of professional personnel, salary and leaves, released time, class loads, school calendar, student discipline, controversal materials, teachers' personal appearance and grooming, grievance policy, and travel provisions. They did not cover a variety of other matters such as recruitment and screening of teaching personnel, instructional activities and personal freedom, and evaluation and reporting of student capabilities and performances. Some of the agreements hardly constrained action by district administrators through lack of specificity and through the open-endedness of provisions. Other agreements were quite specific and constraining.

The stability of the relationship partially relieves administrators from attending to contingency anticipation and planning. Further, the limited comprehensiveness of the agreements leaves substantial areas of autonomy. By limiting the activities subject to influence by the teachers' association, the power of the association to enforce its expectations, even when negotiated, is limited.

Parties to the negotiation process. The negotiated agreements acknowledge the district's board of directors as empowered to act on policy issues, and the superintendent as the key link with the teachers' association representatives. The principals and other middle management personnel are not closely involved in the relationship except as they are parties to grievance actions or are implicated in enforcement of particular agreement provisions. The impact of the association is more likely to be on districtwide issues, with constraints and contingencies on their actions sensed more directly by administrators with systemwide responsibilities.

Timing in the negotiation process. Agreements have been negotiated annually (except for the most recent agreement covering a two-year period). Further, provisions are included in the agreements by which the association shall have the right to meet, confer and negotiate with the board of education prior to board adoption of policies in those areas normally subject to negotiation, regardless whether such occurrences coincide with the negotiation of a comprehensive agreement. The capability of activating the relationship whenever the board should seek to establish or revise policies, and whenever a teacher should feel aggrieved, maintains the presence of the association between times of basic contract bargaining. The potential for constraint of the district's action and further, contingencies of the district's action upon association agreement (involving the possibility of trade-offs or indebtedness) exists continually, exacting toll beyond whatever prerogatives are exchanged or foregone in the periodic press of bargaining.

The generation of predictability and trust. Relationship issues have been predominant during the ESP period, following an earlier developmental phase during which the association had initially negotiated a comprehensive professional agreement with the district. The recent strategy of the association officials has been to gain district acceptance of the importance of the agreement as well as to develop a strong working relationship with the superintendent before initiating another proactive phase.

The development of a strong working relationship depends upon the association's leadership and general members developing trust in their representative, trusting him to represent their best interests in exercising considerable latitude in the working relationship with the superintendent, and developing willingness to commit themselves in advance to abide by what their representative and the superintendent work out. An equivalent development of trust between the superintendent and his board is prerequisite to the effectiveness of the working relationship. The maintenance of trust between the association representative and the district representative, then, depends upon their respective abilities to get their organizations to accept and deliver on the agreements which the two reach, at times in private and informal sessions.

The trust level between the association representative and the district representative had become rather high by 1974-75, and was expressed in their candid communication relationship. (In part this can be attributed to contrasts in the association presidents' leadership styles; an abrasive style of the 1973-74 president was relieved by a non-abrasive style of the 1974-75 president, and as expressed by an official of

the association, ". . . even two year old's know that good behavior is noticed more after one has been bad.") Both the association representative and the superintendent placed high value on peace, recognizing the risks of getting trapped in impasse situations in which neither could win as much as their costs, and the possibilities of non-zero-sum winning by both sides through shared power.

The association has cultivated power bases beyond the district's boundaries, throwing its support to selected candidates in a recent political contest with the candidate which it supported for a judgeship winning election. Association officials have expressed conviction that the superintendent grasped the implications of that development whereby tn the event of a strike, it would be doubtful that the board could get an injuction ordered.

The association's strategy in developing a close working relationship with the superintendent was predicated upon his stability in the district, and in his maintaining predominant influence in the district's linkage with the association.

Issues of Substance

The substantive impacts of the teachers' association upon the schoo. system can be differentiated in terms of employee welfare, professional practices, and institutional welfare. Clearly some issues involve more than one of these categories, and such overlap will be noted.

Employee welfare. The association's efforts have been productive in the bread and butter areas of compensation, working conditions, job security, and representation. In basic negotiated agreement the beginning salary level has been made contingent upon the action of comparable districts, and the maximum salary level has been specified as approximately twise the minimum salary, with intermediate salary steps graduated on a single salary schedule based upon education and experience. The district has agreed to be responsible for premiums covering medical, dental and liability insurance. Further, provisions have been negotiated covering "extra pay for extra work." Salary increases have been negotiated annually, with the average teacher salary in 1974-75 exceeding $12,500. Thus the district's capacity to manipulate a primary extrinsic inventive has been bargained away; school officials cannot reward desired employee behavior through individual salary adjustment or punish undesired behavior by withholding salary increase. Further, the bulk of the district's revenue has been obligated in advance; the total amount and proportion of the general fund revenue subject to discretionary allocation is relatively slight (the negotiated salary structure ties the district to prevailing rates in other districts, ignoring differences in fiscal resources, and inasmuch as the district's revenue sources are comparatively low, the net effect is to obligate a disproportionately large share to salary and benefits).

Working conditions have been subjected to explicit limits. For example, conditions permitting absence from work are detailed in six single-spaced pages of the current negotiated agreement. Planning periods have been reserved, class loads have been

set, travel reimbursement provisions have been specified, and employee permission to use the district's athletic facilities have been guaranteed.

Job security has been protected against capricious action by district officials. Provisions are explicit governing probationary status, evaluation of employee performance, and separation. Transfer of duty assignments, while permitted for numerous reasons under administrative control, is made contingent upon compliance with formal district and state qualification requirements.

The association has won in district court (appealed by the board) the right to expand its constituency to include substitute teachers, thus increasing its' bargaining clout, while potentially swelling its precarious coffers through dues from the newly enfranchised personnel.

Thus managerial freedom to use the district's personnel resources has been subjected to a variety of constraints (as in time of work) and contingencies (as in type of assignment). Such constraints and contingencies, becoming part of the operational schedule and routine of the school system, tend to have a low profile and tend not to be sensed as teachers' association impacts.

Professional practice. Obviously, class load limits, planning period provisions, and assessment practices have strong potential for affecting the core work of the schools, even as those provisions affect the employees' welfare. The association's influence also has been exerted on the selection of instructional and library materials (but loosely), the provision of instructional field trips, and pupil discipline practices. The association was decisive in the deletion of a differentiated staffing provision from the district's initial ESP proposal, and has successfully resisted later district attempts to move toward differentiated staffing patterns.

Beyond its effective resistance of differentiated staffing, the teachers' association has not been much involved pertinent to ESP implementation. Further, the association has hardly penetrated into a number of other areas involving professional practice, such as teacher selection and assignment processes. Rather, district administrators have retained control over the selection of instructional personnel, programs and projects.

The implications of the association's presence for professional practice have been less decisive, specific and binding than for issues predominately involving employee welfare. However, district officials have come to take the association's interests into account and to expect active resistance to some proposals pertinent to professional practice.

Institutional welfare. The association has tendered support to the district in exchange for costs extracted in other areas. However, such support does not represent a net cost to the association which is dependent upon the school system's prosperity of revenue and very survival.

Thus the association traditionally has performed yeoman service in support of the district's special levy campaigns. Similarly the association endorsed the district's ESP proposal (after obtaining deletion of a differentiated staffing provision). Subsequently the association sought representation in the ESP governance structure on a non-voting basis to open channels of communication and thus attempt to avoid possible problems.

The teachers' association has participated in several assessment activities pertinent to the school system's capabilities and performance. Further, a provision was inserted in the negotiated agreement guaranteeing the association's cooperation with the orderly collection and flow of ESP evaluation data, including the sharing of such information with appropriate outside observers and agencies. The association extended unlimited access and positive helpfulness, for example, in the performance of this present inquiry.

Agreements pertaining to such matters as controversial speakers and the personal appearance and grooming of teachers also reflect the association's respect for the need not to provoke displeasure among the local taxpayers.

Thus the association has exhibited responsibility beyond narrow self-interest. In accepting opportunities to support district opportunities it has contributed to the district's welfare as measured in access to revenue sources and community acceptance of district operations.

Interpretive Summary and Implications

The partisan interests and consequent actions of the teachers' association and of the school system have not generated acute polarization and hostile adversary relationships. Rather, interdependence exists between the partisan interests. Teacher welfare can be inferred as the primary interest protected and promoted by the association in the relationship, and institutional welfare can be inferred as the primary interest protected and promoted by the district. Neither can be obtained to the exclusion of the other. Thus the potential exists for non-zero-sum power relations between the organizations in which issues can be resolved to the advantage of at least one of the parties and possibly to both parties without disadvantage to the other. A rather limited development of polarization and adversary relationships, however, does reflect the existence of some zero-sum or win-lose conflict.

Stability has generally prevailed in the teachers' association-school system relationship during the ESP period. Thus the probable actions and reactions of each party have tended to become predictable by the other. This development has been promoted through explicit attention to negotiations pertinent to terms of the association-district relationship, and through efforts to nurture a close working relationship between the representatives of the two organizations. Mutual trust has prospered under these conditions.

Association-district relationships have been developed mainly at the school system's central office and board of directors level. Further, the focus of concerns has been of limited comprehensiveness, leaving a variety of schooling activities and interactions unaffected. Association-district negotiations and interactions also have maintained low visibility, further minimizing the perception of a pervasive and substantive association impact upon district governance. These interrelated tendencies have been particularly applicable with reference to ESP-specific governance structures and activities.

However, pervasive low-profile impacts of the teachers' association have been more significant than casually apparent. Substantial impacts have been largely in the form of inhibiting the range of alternatives considered by school system officials; acceptance by school system officials of major "givens" protected and promoted by the association limit developmental possibilities and the innovative capacity of the school system. Such impacts occur through advance obligation of the major portion of the district's financial resources, coupled with agreements which constrain managerial prerogatives regarding utilization of personnel resources.

These outcomes reflect the district's lack of protection of institutional welfare interests against dominance by teacher welfare interests. The fragmented social system of the district has been vulnerable to focused thrusts of the disciplined teachers' association. District officials have seldom countered the teachers' association's protection of teachers' positions against innovations which entail financial commitments beyond project funding. District officials rarely have exhibited keen awareness of, or inclination to confront the teachers' association's power-aggrandizement.

The existence and activities of the teachers' association thus have constituted stabilizing influences rather than provoking dynamic adjustments in the school system. Uniformity, standardization and conformity to contractual and legalistic definition of such matters as working conditions and professional practices have been promoted. Given institutionalization of such practices the susceptibility of school system operations to dynamic adjustments has been limited.

Paradoxically, long-term transformations in school system characteristics may be instigated. Power-equalization between the organizations may progress, leading to capability of the teachers' association to raise broader issues to negotiation, opening avenues to change. The crystallization and formalization of issues, coupled with increased demands upon management information systems for developing alternatives and for supporting the organization's position (including challenging the other organization's position), may reduce looseness in managerial practices and promote analytic orientation and behavior. Prevailing norms (e.g., conflict-avoidance) may be displaced. Role redefinitions may follow; the work and authority of the principalship position, for example, may take on more limited managerial and clerical functions and shed some instructional and supervisory functions. Over time such developments could generate substantial changes in the character of the school system.